THE BATTLEFIELD OF HOME AND THE WORLD: REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE SELECTED WORKS OF CHITRA BANERJEE, SAUMYA DAVE, AND THRITY UMRIGAR

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

To

Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies

(Deemed to be University)

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CERTIFICATE

I hereby declare that the short synopsis "**The Battlefield of Home & the World: Representation of Women in the Selected Works of Chitra Banerjee, Saumya Dave, and Thrity Umrigar**" being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in **English** under faculty of Media Studies and Humanities of Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad during the academic year 2020-2021.

It is a bona fide record of original work carried out under the supervision of **Dr. Jayashree Hazarika, Assistant Professor, Department of English** and has not been submitted in full part to any other university or institute for degree or diploma. Further, it is certified that the short synopsis is plagiarism free and proof has been submitted for the same.

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Abstract

Women have faced a lot of difficulties throughout their lives, since time immemorial. Be it on the domestic, or the physical front. Be it an upper-class or a lower-class woman. All women have been facing the same struggles, and have been fighting the same battles. Some succeed, and some fail terribly. These failures might even mean giving up on their lives. This synopsis would focus on these battles, from the perspective of bold and strong women. We can see these women through the characters of Maharani Jindan Kaur, Bhima, Sera Dubash, etc.

Each character has a different story to tell, and when they all come together to form a collective voice against domestic and physical battles, a beautiful pattern can be seen. Each woman is alike, yet each is living a vivid new version of life as compared to another. The characters that have been moulded into the pages of these texts represent the trials and tribulations of women in general, and in particular. One can relate to the experiences of these characters and can learn from their bravery and strength.

One major issue which comes up is the one with the husbands. These battles that they fight behind closed doors, will be paid special attention to in the thesis. And will also focus on their survival, after their husband leaves them. Each character's life can be seen both as an individual as well as collectively. Sera Dubash is an upper-class woman whose husband dies. Bhima's husband leaves her. Simran creates a distance from her fiance, and her mother Nandini leaves her husband. Somewhere, this separation is where a new awakening dawns on these women.

This thesis would focus on a detailed analysis of the lives of each female character through the lens of critical theorists as well. The different types of texts that have been chosen and mingled together for this research can hardly be found anywhere else. It will be focusing on each battle a woman faces in her life, and the brave face they put up despite the difficulties that come their way on both the domestic as well as the physical front.

Key Words: Domestic Battles, Love, Physical Battles, Sacrifices, Women

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Introduction

Women have evolved through various experiences that they have had since time immemorial, irrespective of the caste or creed they belong to. Famous writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, describe the plight of women through *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Last Queen*. Her texts bring to light a woman's side of the story which was otherwise deemed irrelevant. Much like women who have become peripheral in today's society.

This short synopsis intermingles three authors' texts, who have different writing styles, yet their characters meet at an intersection. This synopsis will try to look at this intersection and form an analysis. The lives of all women characters in the texts revolve around one struggle after another. We can see Bhima falling from one ditch into another, but it is about how she gathers the fragments of her heart each time and moves ahead. Sera Dubash too keeps on living her life despite the difficult choices and struggles she faces.

Draupadi faces one battle after another, and so does Maharani Jindan. Each of these characters is living a life of immense suffering. It is their willpower to face each battle head-on, and go about their life which would become the primary focus. These stories which have been narrated from the female perspective are tormenting to read at first, but when we look at them and read between the lines, we understand the hidden message which comes out.

The Palace of Illusions can be applied today as well, to the lives of women. Divakaruni gives us a female voice in her novel, she is writing this work from the perspective of Draupadi. The struggles faced by Draupadi begin with her birth from fire, she is confined to her father's dingy Kingdom, and loses more in life when all five of her husbands have been tricked away from their Kingdom. She helps her husbands to fight their battles and takes an active part in their quests. She needs to apply strategies to take control of the household, which passes on to her from her husbands' mother. She shares a mystifying friendship with Krishna and is attracted to one of the enemies. Her voice has been compared to the fire which she was born from, and her perspective of the narrative has been beautifully weaved by Divakaruni. We are able to clearly view her battles and victories, through her inner and outer functioning.

Maharani Jindan Kaur was Ranjit's last and favourite queen, as she was the only one who could see eye to eye with him. *The Last Queen* is the tale of Rani Jindan Kaur, Mother of the Khalsa. The fierce queen history forgot. A regent queen to her son, she defied tradition to step out of the zenana, and conduct the royal business in public. The sharp-eyed and passionate queen led the Khalsa troops to war. A rebel queen who did not let go even after being robbed of her only child. It is a tale of loyalty and betrayal. And of a woman's indomitable will to protect her own, her child, and her kingdom. These two novels focus on the warrior aspects of Panchali and Maharani Jindan. It highlights their curiosity about how the male-centric world works. They take an active role in shaping not only the past but the future of women. These fictional texts have been chosen as they will form the touchstone of how women behaved in the past. This would help in paving the way forward in the thesis on how women have evolved.

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This thesis will also be focusing on the texts of Saumya Dave and Thrity Umrigar. The fictional works of these writers focus on women characters in contemporary times, and will thus lead to a full circle of development of women through the ages. *Well behaved Indian Women* focuses on three generations of women in modern times. The daughter Nandini and the granddaughter Simran have moved to The States, whereas the mother Mimi stays back in India. Simran Mehta is the perfect daughter and to be daughter-in-law, or so we think. Everything turns upside down once Simran begins having a few realizations, as she sits down for a while to reflect on what her life is becoming. Nandini Mehta has tried her best to make ends meet, by being stretched like a rubber band between what she is asked to do, and what she actually wants to do. Mimi Kadakia has done irreparable damage to the relationship she had with her daughter, she tries to make up for this missing feeling when she deals with her grandchild Simran. Mimi, the oldest woman in the family, has faced a lot of choices, and so have the other two Nandini, and Simran. But, with each new generation, a few mistakes were cast off, and a new sphere was adopted.

Well behaved Indian Women questions and re-questions the lives that the women characters are living. These three women have their own fair share of battles they are fighting in their lives. Battles against the male-dominant world, which you can only get rid of once your husband dies and leaves you forever.

The Space Between Us was published in January 2006. This novel is a scene from Mumbai as we see it today. Serabai Dubash is a middle-class woman and Bhima is her maid. They have known each other for 20 years, and all their wounds have been shared. This book focuses on the parallels between the struggles faced by these two women. Both of them have gone through similar troubles in life like losing their husband, a dependent pregnant woman etc. This novel focuses on the division of power in society, and how at times people do not even realize it. This book looks at two women characters who come from different walks of life but share wounds and traumas. These women are facing their everyday battles with each other's support. The sequel to this book *The Secrets Between Us* opens exactly where *The Space Between Us* left off—Bhima is devastated as she is being cast away, and is paying for the heinous crimes faced by her granddaughter. Bhima is free of all the burdens and responsibilities which were on her shoulder in the Dubash family, but she has Maya to look after. When Bhima meets Parvati, both of them begin a beautiful friendship on the same level - selling fruits and vegetables. These two women face their own struggles and come close on the basis of the commonality of their troubles. They learn how to live independent lives, despite not being a part of the more privileged sections of society.

There are other secondary sources, which have been talked about in detail later in the synopsis. The fictional works that have been taken talk about the progression of women through the centuries. Each text has strong women lead characters who depict through their world how women fought battles and were being treated in those times. This synopsis will shed light on women in contemporary times through these texts and will be delving deep into each text and its women characters. The focus would be on their lived experiences, and through those, the evolution of women through the ages will be depicted.

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Literature Review

***The Forest of Enchantments* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (2019)** - Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni gives us the perspective of Sita for the first time ever in The Forest of Enchantments. This story also focuses on some of the other women who had been pushed to the sidelines earlier: Kaikeyi, Surpanakha, and Mandodari. This book talks about honour, infidelity, etc. Chitra gives an in-depth analysis of the lives of women in this great epic which hadn't been given otherwise, as the story had always been focused on men and their achievements and battle stories. The Ramayana resonates with each person even today, but Chitra's version takes a new turn where women understand the power of standing up for themselves. This text plays a huge role in the selection of the topic of the thesis. The powerful imagery of Sita and her story of facing the devils which were prevalent all around her. She came out of one battle and moved into another. This novel is an inspiration to talk about the struggles women face in their own lives.

***Cry the Peacock* by Anita Desai (1963)** - Desai's book focuses on Maya who was fretful about her childhood prophecy. Maya was the daughter of a wealthy lawyer who lived in Lucknow. She is the only one in the family who lives with her father. Her mother had died a few months ago, and her brother had left for America some years ago, she thinks to herself: "No one, no one else, loves me as my father does". Maya's perspective on life changes as all her father's love and attention is bestowed upon her, which gives her a different idea about love. The world to her is her playground, which can be moved and moulded according to her whims and fancies. When she comes of age, she wants her husband Gautama to share the same ideals and carefree attitude as her father, loving her unconditionally. But, Gautama is far from what she had expected in a husband. He is overloaded with work and hardly gives her his time and attention. This makes Maya despondent. Gautama is upset with Maya's obsessive behaviour and warns her. Which makes her fall further into the clasp of dejectedness: "Oh, you know nothing of me and of how I can love. How I want to love. How it is important to me. But you, you've never loved. And you don't love me. . . ." The two have complete opposite dispositions. Maya is on one end of the spectrum where she fills each thing she touches with love. Gautama on the other hand is rational and practical. These battles that Maya faces with her husband and father are reflected in the background of this synopsis.

***Sophia: Princess, Suffragette, Revolutionary* by Anita Anand (2015)** - Princess Sophis was born in 1876. Maharajah Duleep Singh was her father. He was heir to the Kingdom of the Sikhs, a place that stretched from the lush Kashmir Valley to the mountainous foothills of the Khyber Pass and spread across the cities of Lahore and Peshawar. The British looted and plundered their territory after Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who was Duleep's father had died. Maharaja Duleep Singh created an estate while in exile in England, at Elveden, Suffolk. Sophia was the god-daughter of Queen Victoria, and was raised not with the ideals and history of the Sikhs, but with the ways and mannerisms of an Englishwoman: presented at court, afforded grace and favour lodgings at Hampton Court Palace and photographed wearing the latest fashions for the society pages Soon, she travelled to India undercover, and learned about her

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family's history - she returned a revolutionary. Sophia wanted to battle the injustices and inequality that her family had immensely suffered. Her causes were the struggle for Indian Independence, the fate of the lascars, the welfare of Indian soldiers in the First World War – and, above all, the fight for female suffrage. She had inherited the spirit of her grandmother, Maharani Jindan Kaur fighting battles against any and all sorts of unfairness. She had an upper hand as compared to Jindan since she was well versed in the workings of both her Kingdom, as well as Queen Victoria's. The steps that she took and the battles that she fought for righteousness become a foreground for my synopsis.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman **by Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) -** This book is one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy. Wollstonecraft claims that women are a salient part of society as they not only educate themselves but their children and families. And thus they should be given a proper education. She claims that women too deserve the right to be treated as humans and not objects who lure men with their charms. There are a few men who want to deny women education and feel women who are educated are abominable. Wollstonecraft's writing on women was an inspiration to take up the texts and women characters who have suffered so much at the hands of their husbands. This again is a battle in which two female characters Maharani Jindan Kaur, and Panchaali are already fighting in as we understand in the thesis later.

A Room of One's Own of Woman **by Virginia Woolf (1929) -** This is considered one of Woolf's best works. This work had been written after Woolf delivered lectures at Cambridge University about women and fiction. She discusses how women have been proscribed in the fields of finance, education, and society. She believes that "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction". Much of her argument ("to show you how I arrived at this opinion about the room and the money") is developed through the "unsolved problems" of women and fiction writing to arrive at her conclusion, although she claimed that was only "an opinion upon one minor point". Virginia argues that women have never been able to become good and recognized writers since they had been deprived of resources and good opportunities. She also adds the story of a fictional character Shakespeare's sister, explaining that if she had gotten the chance to write, she would have even exceeded the writings of Shakespeare. She gives examples of George Eliot, George Sand, and the Brontes. These women wrote under the pen names of men, to become distinguished writers, which was in contrast to Jane Austen, who had written as a woman. This work draws a parallel with the women characters that have been taken in this synopsis. It will become a background for positioning women in the thesis.

Inventing Herself **by Elaine Showalter (2001) -** Showalter gives examples of women from the 18th century to the present day on women. With sources as diverse as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *Scream 2, Inventing Herself* is a book which focuses on the experiences of women who want to make a change in the world. These women tried to work, travel, think, love, and even die in ways that were ahead of their time. In doing so, they forged an epic history that each generation of adventurous women has rediscovered. The book focuses on Mary

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Wollstonecraft and Margaret Fuller to Germaine Greer and Susan Sontag, preeminent scholar Elaine Showalter digs deep into the feminist aspects of these women, and how they stood for what was right for them. Elaine illuminates the contributions of Eleanor Marx, Zora Neale Hurston, Simone de Beauvoir, Margaret Mead, and many more. Showalter, a highly regarded critic known for her provocative and strongly held opinions, has here established a compelling new Who's Who of women's thought. This is not a history of perfect women, but rather of real women, whose mistakes and even tragedies are instructive and inspiring for women today who are still trying to invent themselves. This book will create a full circle for the feminist theories that will be used in my thesis.

Critical Perspectives on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni by Amritjit Singh and Robin Field (2022) - Divakaruni's novels have been shaped by her own struggles she has faced in her life, as well as the influence on her from the feminist writers and other mentors she had in academia. Amritjit and Robin give us quite a few perspectives on how Divakaruni came to be such a popular writer. One can also find interviews with Chitra in this work, these give us a perspective on where her personal inspiration and social concerns lie. This book covers twelve essays. These scholars explore Divakaruni's interconnectivity and wholeness by linking races, people from different places etc. within the Indian diaspora.

Bhima's Struggle Against Class Discrimination in Thrity Umrigar's The Space Between Us by Angelin Elizabet Buiswardin Diaz (2016) - This is an undergraduate student's work, where she highlights and elaborates on the character of Bhima, her class and the society around her, as well as the discrimination which is prevalent in India. This work would give me a new perspective looking at the works of Thrity Umrigar.

Woman in the Nineteenth Century by Margaret Fuller (1845) - Margaret basis her essay on the fact that men will become elevated beings when they understand what divine love is. She says that there were times when people had more cognizance of this kind of love, but at the moment it is as if everyone is in deep slumber. Margaret feels like men are on the path to a new awakening, and there is still hope for them to understand and become enlightened. She believes that there will come a time when instead of women depending on men, men will be dependent on women, and that will bring a time of true equality. Her essay will be used to define how women characters in this short synopsis have taken the lead when men wanted to fall back and detract.

The Subjection of Women by John Stuart Mill (1869) - This essay had been written in 1861, and is pertinent even today. Stuart believed that the subjection of women was mostly related to psychological and political issues, and urged the establishment of "complete equality in all legal, political, social, and domestic relations between men and women." He understood that women were left out of legal reform matters like women's exclusion from the political process, their lack of any rights in marriage, and the benefits to be obtained by their liberation. There should also be equal opportunities and education for women, in the education and employment section. His idea was mostly based on an optimistic front, where one day each walk of life

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would be equal for both sexes. This book was a landmark in the struggles for human rights. Jindan Kaur and Panchaali are two characters who remain steadfast in their faith to gain an equal education as their brothers or even more so in Jindan's case. And, in Bhima and Parvati's case employment opportunities can be compared to John's essay.

The Female Malady by Elaine Showalter (1985) - In this informative, timely and often distressing study, Elaine Showalter exhibits how cultural ideas about 'proper' feminine behaviour have shaped the definition and treatment of female insanity for the last 150 years, and have led to mental trauma and sexual objectification. Elaine talks about therapeutic practices often getting inspiration from Mary Wollstonecraft and Doris Lessing. Highly original and beautifully written, The Female Malady is an important antipodal of madness in women, showing how it is a repercussion of, and not a deviation from the traditional feminine role.

Sexual Politics by Kate Millett (1970) - This book had been written in the 1970s and traces the subjugation of women both at the literature and art front. Kate Millett's book focuses on four authors-D. H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, and Jean Genet-and build a profile relating to literature's myths surrounding patriarchal beliefs and their extension into psychology, politics, and philosophy. The examples given by her are relatable even today, as we understand the differences between god-given, and acquired feminine and masculine traits. This work will be highly relatable to all women characters that have been taken up in this synopsis.

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Description of Broad Area

Significance of Study

This study would shed light on the battles of women. It would make people aware that women have fought, through these texts and theories, and are still sidelined. This would be an attempt to bring women to the forefront. This would help the readers look at these women characters in a new light. What is the use of these sacrifices made by women, if no one is aware of them? I would highlight women and their different struggles with the help of these fictional texts. The current research would directly or indirectly lead to female empowerment. It would allow readers to view these works in a new way. Reading these novels would implant a fresh awakening in the lives of women in the 21st century. It will be focusing on a few women characters, but the experiences of these characters somewhere compare to women in real life.

Statement of the Problem

My research with the title, The Battlefield of Home & the World: Representation of Women in the Selected Works of Chitra Banerjee, Saumya Dave, and Thrity Umrigar, would be highlighting the battles of women in a male dominant society. We call ourselves equal today but are still pulled by the strings of patriarchy. A combination of these female characters will give us new learnings and a wholesome approach to women. These female characters and their experiences will give readers a new insight into their lives - individually and collectively.

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Aims and Objectives of Research

The aim of the current research is to analyze, study, identify and discuss through the lived experiences of the characters in my primary texts, and to understand how women have fought through these texts. I have taken up texts from three different writers which show women characters who represent similar, yet different struggles. This research would help us understand what kind of battles these women characters have fought. These can be battles in their personal lives fighting patriarchy. Or, the battles they have helped their near and dear ones fight for justice against wrongdoings.

1. To understand the lives of each female character presented in the works of Chitra Banerjee, Saumya Dave, and Thrity Umrigar.
2. To find out how these women characters in post-modern times have struggled through critical writings on the basis of their caste and domestic struggles.
3. To analyze the different struggles of women characters as reflected in the selected works of authors.
4. To explore the image of women in the context of battles they are facing both at the domestic and physical front.
5. To make a comparative assessment of the behavioural traits of all the female characters presented in the texts.

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Methodology to be Adopted

The methodology used in this synopsis is a close reading and analysis of the primary texts, keeping in mind the theorists and the secondary texts. These materials will set forth the struggles and battles of female characters, understanding their lives from childhood to adulthood.

The secondary source materials are feminist theorists, and a few comparable titles, where women have fought on the frontlines which each challenge that came their way. This is being used to develop the theoretical background for understanding the characters' lives better. Literary feminist writers' works like that of Virginia Woolf, Mary Wollstonecraft, Elaine Showalter etc. have been used to understand the origins of equality and awareness of equality.

The differences based on class and gender, rich and poor have also been highlighted in these power struggle situations. This is highlighted in Thrity Umrigar's works where Bhima and Serabai are maids and owners respectively. Their combined wounds bring them together for a brief period of time only to set them on a different journey later on.

This textual analysis would be the methodology used in this thesis.

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Chapter Scheme

Chapter I: Introduction

The first chapter would be focusing on the foundation and roots of where the battles of women emerge, and how it stems. I would be laying the foundation of the texts with respect to Women's Theories. The practices that were condemned for women would also be mentioned in this chapter. I would then move on to talk about domestic and physical battles, and elaborate on the two concepts. This would be a generic description of the lives of Women in the primary texts, and what we can learn from it. In a similar manner, I would be giving a generic description of these battles in lieu of the theories I will take up.

Chapter II: Women Characters and their struggles in the selected works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

In this chapter I would be delving deep into the lives of Maharani Jindan Kaur, and Panchali. The learnings and the improvements that can be done in the lives of these women characters and women, in general, will then be highlighted.

Chapter III: Three Generations of women and the different lives they live, in *Well Behaved Indian Women* by Saumya Dave

In a similar manner, I would dig deep into the details of the lives of three generations of women. And how these characters learn from each other on the base, but as they go on they create their own path. Each woman has faced something similar but completely different.

Chapter IV: Different castes but the same wounds in the selected works of Thrity Umrigar

This chapter would be focusing on the battles and strengths of Sera Dubash, a middle-class woman, and her maid Bhima. Their lives and instances would be extracted on the basis of the theories and the phases in which troubles assail them.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

The concluding chapter would be comparing all the characters on the basis of the battles they have fought and come out of as a phoenix. This comparison would help us review how women can become numb to the pain that comes their way, and always come out victorious. But, no one appreciated their struggles and strife, and how they have managed to live despite all odds against it.

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Expected Outcome of Research

1. Attempts to prove that women in the works of Chitra Banerjee, Saumya Dave, and Thrity Umrigar have come a long way in contemporary times, through the struggles and battles they fight.

2. Striving to explore the female characters of the novelists, in light of critical theories.

3. Expected to prove that women characters have evolved in the post-modern times.

4. Likely to create a vivid path of the struggles the women characters have faced.

5. This thesis is likely to establish that the struggles of women characters are interdependent and they have fought, advanced, and moved ahead irrespective of the religion and caste they belong to.

Ultimate outcome would be to put forth an analysis proving that the women characters have been victorious in the battles they have faced and fought in, and have received some form of fulfillment and closure, through the sacrifices they have made.

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THE BATTLEFIELD OF HOME AND THE WORLD: REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE SELECTED WORKS OF CHITRA BANERJEE, SAUMYA DAVE, AND THRITY UMRIGAR

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